

Play

Dr Charlotte Cooper

I don't like to play/I like to play

When I was a kid I was bullied by someone in my family who made sure that I lost the games they played with me or was otherwise beaten and outrun. I came to hate the idea of winners and losers and stayed away from games where this is a central concept.

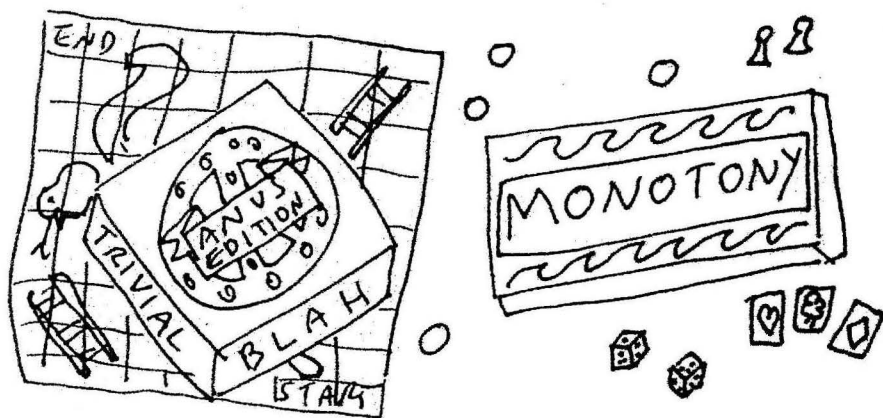
In the playground at school I preferred games where people all joined together to do something extraordinary, like creating a giant chain of kids roaming around together with our arms linked, but this was usually discouraged by teachers who wanted us to practise and win sporting medals instead. No thanks!

In adulthood I've found board games and card games very dull. I can never be bothered to learn or abide by the rules. Why bother with counters and dice? I'd rather sit and talk or draw or make something together. Subterfuge is a big part of game-playing and it's not for me, I like things to be open and honest, I prefer collaboration. I don't understand the need for a box of things to help people have fun when we have imagination on our side.

With all this going on it's funny that I still like games and that play remains a big part of my life. I have a large repertoire of home-made games that usually require little more than a piece of paper and a pen, or the willingness to be silly.

Some games are private and I don't want to share them. But this zine is a collection of some of the games I've invented, co-devised with my loves, or adapted. Often the games have politics at their root, but they have always arisen subconsciously. Playing is freedom, resistance, creation.

I invite you to come out to play with me, with the caveat that consent is a beautiful thing and that it's ok to say no if you don't want to join in.



Face and body games

I present these games in a context where embodiment and movement have so often been appropriated and commodified into exercise, weight loss or being fit and sexy. Honestly, fuck that.

Pretty face

This is a game about how social standards of beauty, prettiness and niceness are really creepy. It is for all genders.

On the count of three you are invited to pull the prettiest face you can and hold it still for about ten seconds. *You will look really unnerving.* Other people present should say: "Oh! So pretty!" as you pose. No hands or accoutrements are allowed, it's all about the face. Do this by yourself, take turns in a group, or do it all together with other people. Play this again and again until you get bored.

The Calling

A game about religion. This is like Pretty Face but instead of being pretty you try and look as holy and enlightened as you can. You can move a bit more and use your hands. Ideally this is played with at least two people. One person acts as though they are being called by The Lord, and the other provides a soundtrack by calling out their name gently, as though from a distance, adding: "Coo-eee, it's meee, Jesus." An alternative version of this game entails being called by the devil.

And jazz hands

For two or more players who just want to mess around a bit. If you don't know what Jazz Hands is, read the wiki and look at a video first. One player is the caller and one is the dancer. The caller calls out dance moves for the dancer to perform. Try and be jazzy with your language and take care with the dancer's physical limits. When the dancer looks as though they have had enough, end the session with the phrase and action "...and Jazz Hands!" before swapping places or moving on to the next dancer and caller.

Handy bats

Pretend your hand is a flapping creature called a Handybat and that you are a television presenter describing its lifestyle and habits. In my experience, Handybats are quite shy and capricious things, they like to settle on an arm or visit someone's shoulder, but they are easily scared away. This is just a game of cuteness, nothing more.

Drawing games

These are devilish games for idle hands. Don't fret about your drawings not being good enough. The worst drawings are always the best and anyway, this is about playing, it doesn't matter what your stuff looks like.

Make it Ruder

This is a game for people who like things that aren't allowed in polite society. It is not an excuse to be oppressive but it is an opportunity to fuck with taboo and propriety which, I think, is a world-changing thing. To see a version of this game in action, watch the Homosexual Death Drive video for Theme, available at homosexualdeathdrive.com.

You start by drawing the rudest thing you can imagine in the middle of a piece of paper. You hand it to the next player with the instruction "Make it ruder" and so they do. Players are encouraged not to hold back and to immerse themselves in what they feel to be extremely rude indeed.

This game is for any number of players. You can play alone, adding your own embellishments, or pass the sheet along to others to make their contributions. Each player adds to the central image, or someone else's contribution and draws as quickly as they can. If there is a large group you can have several sheets in circulation simultaneously so that people aren't bored waiting. The page is passed on until it is covered, at which point the game ends and you have the rudest picture ever.

Feel free to invent other versions of this game, though please credit me if you do and give me a royalty. If you are not feeling rude you don't have to be rude. My loves and I have played Make it More Baroque, for example, which involved a lot of ornamentation and decoration. Your imagination is the only thing limiting you.



This Spoils It

My middle brother got into trouble as a kid by drawing a lovely picture of a cow with some turds shooting out of its arse. His teacher drew rings in red ink around the poo and wrote the immortal line: "This spoils it."

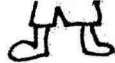
This 'spoils it' is a game for killjoys, people who prefer life's underbelly and those who choose to dwell in nefariousness. The game is played in a similar manner to Make it Ruder, where a central drawing is added to by others, or by yourself, and continues until the page is full.

You start with a very nice picture of something in the middle of the page, perhaps a flower, a cute animal, a pleasant house, a strong man or a pretty lady in a lovely dress. The next person spoils the picture with something horrible, perhaps a disease, a weapon, a bodily emission, and so on. Other players add their own original spoilings. When the game ends you say in a loud and prissy voice: "This spoils it."

Bad Toon Rising

Almost everyone knows what Mickey Mouse looks like, and almost everyone has a clear picture in their mind's eye of popular cartoon characters, no matter where they grew up. But drawing these iconic figures is another matter, even when they appear to be a simple collection of lines and dots on paper. I invite you to have a go at drawing, say, Bugs Bunny, or The Simpsons without looking at any reference material. Don't be shy, don't worry, don't hold back, don't take too long. All you need is a pen and a piece of paper. You will be astonished at how little your own drawing resembles the picture in your head and how funny your own rendering looks, much funnier than the official versions. Therefore this is a game to loosen the corporate and imperialist grip on your imagination. By the way, some years ago my girlfriend and I made an online gallery of people's Bad Toons. You can still visit it at badtoonrising.com





Cheerful games

I work as a psychotherapist and I witness a lot of anxiety in my clinical work. These cheerful games are a kind of salve, but they have a shadow side which is about life where stress, ugliness, misery can no longer be tolerated or resolved. In a way they are games that mask difficult emotions in situations where people might be better off dealing with them directly.

Benign Pop Songs

Lots of pop songs are about things people don't want to do. Try and list as many of them as you can and then sing them out loud but with one subtle difference: change the negative to a positive. Notice how uplifting the song becomes even though it has been ruined.

To get you going, try some of these lyrics:

- I'm Not in Love by 10cc becomes: "I am in love, so please forget it, it's not a silly phase I'm going through..."
- I Don't Wanna Walk Around With You by The Ramones becomes: "I wanna walk around with you..."
- (I can't get no) Satisfaction by The Rolling Stones becomes: "I can get some satisfaction..."
- I Can't Stand The Rain by Ann Peebles becomes: "I can stand the rain against my window, bringing back sweet memories..."

On the other hand, Never Gonna Give You Up by Rick Astley becomes quite sinister: "I am gonna give you up, I am gonna let you down, I am gonna run around and desert you, I am gonna make you cry, I am gonna say goodbye, I am gonna tell a lie and hurt you".

Everything is Nice

This is a game for people who want to avoid being upset. It involves telling the most insipid story that you can imagine. When you run out of steam, which you may do quite quickly, you stop or pass it on to the next player.

Examples:

Player one: "A giggling fairy sprinkled magic petals on a cupcake that was then eaten by a funny, rumples and much-loved teddy bear."

Player two might up the stakes with this: "A kitten played with another kitten and then they had a lovely nap together on a pretty blanket."



Survival games

These are tools for navigating dangerous territories as a queer such as family gatherings, work colleagues, border guards, clergy and community feuds. They ease pain that often feels insurmountable.

The Horrible Smile

To do a horrible smile, you just smile. But you resist doing a pretty smile, a kind smile or a friendly smile. Instead you curl your lips, bear your teeth and gums, screw up your eyes. You are basically pulling a grotesque face at someone whilst making it look as though you are smiling.

The horrible smile is for handling people do not treat you with respect. It's a way of handling unhelpful helpers, rude or intrusive comments and stares, systems that belittle and diminish you, an on-going barrage or micro-aggressions that are designed to keep you in your place. Horrible smiles are passive-aggressive and not revolutionary, but they get people off your back and give you some momentary breathing space. The person to whom you are horrible-smiling will be oblivious to the fact that you have demonstrated some small resistance. They will most likely pull a nice smile back at you. This can feel very satisfying.

This strategy is for the subaltern, the underling, the subordinate. It is not to be used by anyone with connections to dominant society power and never against anyone working in service industries.

Bingo

This is a variation of bullshit, buzzword or office bingo which involves pepping-up dull meetings by writing a secret list of management jargon phrases and ticking them off as they arise.

The same format can be applied to depressing family gatherings, grim social events or other stressful situations where you might encounter oppressive and insensitive actions, general thoughtlessness and wankerdom.

You simply write a list of things that are likely to come up and tick them off as they arise. It's better if you can play the game with another person. You do this by randomly splitting the list between you, it doesn't matter if they are there or not, you can report back later (but be honest). I don't advocate competitiveness but here the one with the most ticks at the end of the event wins a prize such as a cocktail, a foot rub, or whatever. This means that you will both be rooting for people to do the things you'd rather they didn't. If you successfully predict the bingo list, you win; if nothing on the list happens, you also win because you are less likely to have been subjected to the things that piss you off.



Oh! Such a Pretty Face!

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PS. In 2012 I co-organised an event called The Fattylympics which was kind of about playing non-competitive games collectively. You can find out about it here: fattylympics.blogspot.co.uk